

into the darkness with a joyous whistle. My perfect holiday certainly sent me back to Pimlico whistling joyously. If yours doesn't do the same for you—and I *do* hope that yours will be of like texture with mine—I'll 'mortgage my boiler', as an engine-driver friend of mine used to put it.

Which of us two is the luckier, Althea? I in my ever-loving daughter? or you in

Your ever-loving Father?

Postmark from Poros

A HOLIDAY OUT OF ENGLAND

by OSWELL BLAKESTON

THE postcards had been coming for some weeks, and I'd been putting them back in the letter-box. They weren't meant for me, but someone had been careless or psychological about a street or a street number. I wrote 'Not Known At This Address' on them in red pencil, and let the G.P.O. take the responsibility for a love affair that might be going very wrong. I thought postmen—whose work must surely depend to a large extent on instinct—would detect the right address, and then the cards would stop their intrusion. They didn't. The cards kept on turning up at desperate intervals; and I—started to read them seriously.

They were shiny cards full of a foreign sun, and the colours were painful when I found them under the white-grey envelopes of English bills. The writer of the cards had a firm hand, for his thought was clear and direct—it was a demand. He commanded his friend to join him on some Aegean island . . . it was heaven . . . there could be no valid reason for one moment's delay . . . the sun was the bright fierce wonder on the postcards . . . romance was just around the corner from Victoria Station . . . how could anyone be so unenterprising as to stew in the grime and routine of London? And the messages became more imperative and contemptuous as they failed to reach their destination. 'Are you content,' said the writer of the cards, 'to miss everything?'

And I knew what he meant. Perhaps this was a last chance for

many of us. Europe was in shadow—but there was yet time. There was the inevitable inertia of the Londoner, but the material problems were not insuperable. People had written books on how it was possible to spend a complete holiday (plus railway fare, plus tips, plus booze) in some foreign country for an outlay of ten pounds. There were tricks. You took a fake return ticket between two adjacent stations, and then you were entitled to reductions on fares to long-distance places. It didn't make sense but it worked: romance *was* to be bought for a few quid at a pigeon-haunted terminus. Why, then, shouldn't I take another's warning? Why should I be content to miss everything?

So I let Peggy tell me again her story of the southern town, of the castle where any traveller might spend the night as the Count's guest, and indeed be housed and fed for so long as he desired provided that in no circumstances, in no circumstances whatsoever, did he ever attempt to see or speak to the Count. And I began to collect travel folders and have dreams of snakes wriggling in black sand among old blown newspapers.

But I'd never before been 'out' of England in the exotic sense of 'out'. Oh, I'd seen the cabaret of the twelve apostles in a cellar in Berlin, and I'd been told in Paris that a blue cinema could not provide a film of a rape because of technical difficulties for the cinematographer ('You see, monsieur, a rape cannot be rehearsed'), and in Brussels I'd watched a desolate *poilu* trying to take a photograph of the Mannekin Pis with a faulty camera which he'd bought from a hawker, and there had been the whole tragedy of the world in his '*Il ne marche pas*'. But Paris, Berlin and Brussels are western capitals. They were, in their way, marvellous holiday memories, especially Paris, which, with its vistas, gardens, white cats and cigarettes like a meadow burning, is so much more than the tourist's conception of something that happens at the end of a pier; for even to set foot on the soil of France is to enter a country where the ordinary housewife's shopping bag has an extra pocket for the wine bottle. All the same, capitals belong to a different order of postcard.

So, finally, I took my resolution to discover the glory that was Greece to a great London station where you could do everything:

see a movie, buy flowers, eat a smoked salmon sandwich, or get into a train marked 'Istamboul Express'. I said good-bye to London, and I thought of the mildewed heads of broken statues lying in the avenues at the Crystal Palace, the tables, in the vast and deserted restaurant, which were so far apart that sparrows came and picked up crumbs between them, and the organ playing in the empty house of glass at midnight, long after the fireworks. I thought of the glowing ash from a pipe vanishing down a suburban archway.

But I wasn't ready to acknowledge the Golden Coast when I came to it; for, in the light of my Aegean cards, I thought of the Riviera as no more than Woolworth's gone expensive. I was in no mood for the casino where a young poet gambled a rose on number thirteen and won—a bunch of pansies. Yet already I had seen a porter sweeping a station platform with a palm leaf, already I was slipping into the shiny sun as I looked from the window of the train at the cafés where sat, in readiness for the rich American matrons, the young men who had borrowed their father's curling tongs, not for their moustaches, but to curl the hair on their chests over their low *gilets*.

Then . . . Venice. Venice in an early-morning mist and a sick cat coughing up its lungs on a windowsill; Venice under its new régime with boys in breeches strutting about to rebuke the tourist who dropped cigarette butts; the new Venice with the same old filthy lavatories. My heart, too, hardened against Venice till the mist was drawn into a postcard sun and I told myself that perhaps my holiday had begun, for I learnt the name for the cheapest and most potent drink, and I sat in the square where the proportions are so marvellous that at night you think of invisible chandeliers. And at night I found a gondola to take me to the Greek boat which would carry me to Athens.

The ship's cat had fur matted with salt, and, as the boat pitched, the cat would take one step forward and three steps back. The calm Mediterranean indeed! Why, the ship's cat had a mew like a seagull. And we, who were the third-class passengers, were not allowed knives with our food, so little trusted were we in the reeking, tossing ship from Greece.

Then . . . ATHENS!

Another capital, but this time a capital of the Orient. Surely now my holiday *had* begun. For it was fantasy, this Paris of the Orient. The harbour . . . but then all harbours are attractive, and one never has to rearrange the decorations of a harbour; but this time sailing boats, little local steamers with men on the decks holding young rams in their arms, the low dives of the water-front and the hookahs tasting of fish glue, the games played with counters like large peppermints, the tiny cups of thick coffee, and the beads fingered merely to pass the time: 'You say I do not speak the truth? What would you, one must do something to pass the day?' And then the bus, steering like a mad ship between the dips and craters in the roads, to the heart of Athens.

The smartest street, and a photographer sits on the pavement in front of his back-cloth, a woodland scene, and a kiosk selling religious lanterns, rubber goods and sticks of incense, and in the smart-street-restaurants they still serve a plate of chipped potatoes as a luxury for people who know how to cook grass, and wine—except in the smart hotel which is patronized by the American who made a fortune writing radio programmes for an aperient ('X's syrup gets to the bottom of the trouble')—still has the resined astringency of a mouthwash. The smartest street, and everyone pauses to smell the bouquets of wild flowers held by the vendors with the large black eyes. An old Greek woman looks at the flowers and says to a passer-by, 'Do you want to smell a rose?' She pulls up eight petticoats and on the last is pinned a bloom.

And the Lido of Athens—a coast-line torn from dirty paper with kitchen chairs arranged on a collapsing cliff. But at the Lido two Greek boys are talking earnestly about 'the things which really matter':

First Greek boy: 'So I told him it would not be fitting to smoke in his presence, for he is my father. Yes, he—the evil one, the cuckold, the bastard, the horned one—is my father.'

Second Greek boy: 'Let us forget our fathers. Last night I had important work with the girls.'

First Greek boy: 'How did it go?'

Second Greek boy: 'Importantly.'

First Greek boy: 'You have a nice voice.'

Second Greek boy: 'It is an important voice.'

First Greek boy: 'I, too, have important work this afternoon. I am going to drink a glass of water and buy a sweet cake and look at the sea and think of my friend who is far away. It will be very important.'

Oh yes, the importance of crazy Athens! Perhaps I qualified now to send postcards myself. For I had found the haunts of the tired Turk—the only cat who was treated humanely had holes bored in his ears and wore tassels; I had found the poverty and the riches, the museums where the most intimate domestic objects of the past (combs, hairpins, small rings in bone) were mercilessly exposed to casual curiosity. But in spite of the Acropolis, in spite of the steps of the Lycabetus, I never really came face to face with the glory that was Greece in Athens. Perhaps it was because Athens is a capital, or perhaps it was because I was so eager to keep my date with an Aegean Island. I was, after all, committed to following a postmark.

From Athens I went to the Island of Poros.

In Poros every hope of my holiday was fulfilled. I found the magic that was and the magic that is. No longer could I feel that I had missed everything. . . .

An Aegean evening. A Greek boy says, 'I was out alone last night, but I was not frightened. I looked at the white blossoms and they went click, click, click, one after another, in an anti-clockwise direction.' A cork with a feather stuck in it drifts on a sea like cotton wool with one wave crinkling ten miles off the clear, inaccurate vision of the South. On a little quay, which is a café, a foreigner turns over his glass, thereby inadvertently offering a deadly insult to the landlord. Two natives clink glasses above and below: overt advances. Night comes on velvet. A starlet falls from the sky, a gentle, rocking, floating light; another soars. The boys are playing balloons, the kerosene chips burning beneath the paper bags. The game tires, and they take straws and blow up frogs. A boy says, 'I saw the nymphs in the Bay of Little Pines. They were beautiful girls who asked me to dance with them; but I took to my heels and ran.' 'And how did you know these beautiful girls

were nymphs?' 'Why, their noses were in the middle of their foreheads.'

In the tavern with numbered tables—numbered so that the nightly accounts can be chalked up on a slate—there is the Eye of God. I hint that one might wish to forget when one is making merry. Then I discover the whole difference between the North and the South. This is not the dread holy picture of the Northern convent girl, the divine eye which watches the secret sin. This is the eye which says no harm can come to you because I am watching: get drunk, it won't matter, I'll look after you.

One day I rowed, with thin oars, from our island to a place on the mainland where grew the vegetation which means, in this land of rocks, the threat of malaria: the litmus flowers turning from blue to pink, the flower which has a spiral leaf like apple-peel shaved in one piece, and which froths in summer and is called Saliva, Secret Love with its hidden flowers, the dead berry bush like barbed wire, the field of poppies like blood, of daisies like snow, of purple flowers like scented rain. The perfume of wild herbs, the sea breeze.

On the mainland there is a church dedicated to the patron saint who protects the lemon trees from caterpillars, the patron saint who protects the trees from locusts, and the saint who protects the trees from moss. And you walk past the sleeping labourers who make a star-fish under a tree, to the mountain village with its oil street lamps, to the steep street up which a donkey carries an old dame bearing two live chickens between tall grasses, the street where small boys with eyes like olives offer green almonds to eat in their husks, and shepherds, carrying crooks, guide sufficient goats (gentle satyrs, foolish monsters) to people a monastery.

You climb from the village to the ledge of the mountains, and here is the mark like a goat's foot in the rock, the Devil's foot when he leapt the abyss—for is it not because goats have the feet of a devil that they are able to climb mountains? And the path twists down to The Temple of the Healer, where jokes were scratched on the walls for the patients, as in the modern ante-room they are left with old copies of *Punch*. You can lie here smelling the thyme, watching the enormous bee rub pollen from the flowers, seeing the

turning silver of the olives, and the shapes of men who are no longer there. You can gaze out to sea, to other islands like tables on the flat water, and you can wonder why all butterflies are seventeen years old. Or you can hold out grass for the blue goat and guess what they call him, the countrymen who call anything black 'Arabian', and anything grey, 'Fish'. Have you not passed the stone from which Theseus drew the sword to slay the minotaur?

There is a local joke, on Poros, that the men die early because of the women; and old women survive as death's-heads at every window, behind every water pot at the fountain, and they are not meek for the end when it comes. An old woman says, 'I don't want to die, for you will all mock me as you mocked my mother.' Dead old women are dressed as brides and wedding candy is thrown at them. The men have their revenge by singing: 'Why do you leave us so soon? With what dark groom do you go?'

The truth about the women is that they know, no matter how beautiful the girl, without a dower she dies an old maid; and their bitterness against the natural homosexuality of the men poisons their lives. The men drink and dance with one another, talk and work together, and the women grow old out of spite. They died at their wedding in which so much is made of death, with songs about the little lemon tree, sweet little lemon tree which bears us golden fruit, stinking little lemon tree which smells like a dead cat and grows from our bones.

The old men, who die young, still wear peasant costume—long white stockings above clogs with pompoms and stuffy shirts made, one would think, for any climate but a southern one—and work to support the younger generation who will not have to labour until the older men are dead. 'I?' says a youth proudly. 'I am a planter of cucumbers.' And he sits in the café and to the girls he says: 'I cannot accept your proposal this month, for it is the month when dogs marry; and do not ask me next month, for then the cats mate.'

It is quite accepted that countrymen can go to a tavern at night without purchasing a drink, tell beads and sit with the 'unseen stranger', the chair which is placed immediately in front of the chair for the bottom, the chair for the feet. Poverty is taken for granted: a man has the inside of the olive and the outside of a

walnut. So he may sit in a café and hope that someone may start to sing, that someone may produce a mandolin, a zither.

Then how gay is a Greek tavern! One man holds out a handkerchief, another seizes it, the line grows, moves forward, simple steps with Tiller-girl precision, and the leader, the man at the head of the line, adds flourishes, twists under the handkerchief, flings up his legs, hisses. Middle-aged and young step daintily in the circle; but each man dances to please himself, and woe betide the stranger who applauds. An American bishop, kind and patronizing, had to be rescued from the outraged dancers by the police.

Two boys dance alone, with arms round each other's necks, dance to oriental music beneath the stars which are stones in the path. Above are the fig trees—fig leaf against the sky—shaking shadows over another, a sailor who skips by himself. A patriarch dances with a youth, lowering the handkerchief so that the boy may touch the ground with his head; and as he dances he drinks, throwing the glasses to the ground, stamping on them with his bare feet.

Yet in each male breast there is the bud of death—the sacrifice motif. A black cock is sacrificed to the corner stone of every new building—hold him down and saw off his head.

A young Greek went to America. He returned to his native island to tell them he was a millionaire. He lavished money at the cafés. He promised the town a new water system. He went to his hotel. He told his mistress to change her dress. He waited for her on the balcony. Then he told her to change to another dress. Five times he made her change. Then he shot her and killed himself. They found he would have had no money to pay for the new water system he had promised the town. He had spent everything in the cafés. The whole affair was considered quite in order. He had made the right sacrifice, he was forgiven. And if people thought of him, afterwards, it was as the lad who went fishing with a spear and a lantern at night for octopi.

And all this for one ticket from Victoria. . . .

Ah, I was in Poros for Holy Week, and it was unforgettable. On Good Friday cannons sounded all day, and they were the reverberations of Christ's body moving in the tomb. In the cafés

three black knaves, slipped from the worn packs of playing cards, hang from the ceiling, the black triangle which is Pontius Pilate. The bells ring out the silver nails of Christ's coffin. One must not slaughter an animal today or make love. The heat and the stillness which has no inner stillness. The suspense because of the fireworks which the Government says may not be fired till Easter Sunday, but which everyone knows will flash tonight.

Evening and the sea is silk. The ship which serves the island is illuminated in the bay, moving slowly in gently chugging circles. Lights spring up on the watch tower. From the churches, with their ikons of beaten silver in which holes are cut for painted faces, come the processions with their candles, some climbing up and over the cobbled streets of the town, others moving twice by the water's reflection, all with a Christmas-cake affair on high, a kernel in which is hidden the crucifix. Wax drips everywhere. In the squares, where hundreds of fingers of light pause, the priest can hardly be heard above the jokes and laughter. One procession is late, coming from a far-off chapel. As it appears the lights on the ship fuse. An old woman cries, 'Why have you slighted our procession?'

Easter Sunday, and Old Sixty Hairs, the priest with the small beard, is busy collecting eggs. Some, who dare not refuse, will still mutter the worst curse of all: 'I would destroy the whole world with this, and give my soul to my friend.' Others will present a red-dyed egg in the middle of a loaf of bread, for Sixty Hairs has recently been indisposed and has neglected to baptize the children, and some parents are getting anxious.

Easter brings a travelling theatre with its actors who are praised and then shrugged away with, 'But after all it is nothing, they do it for money.'

Oh, why should one ever leave Poros?

Yet the sands are running out—and this is a doom more inescapable than the end of a holiday.

When I first came to Poros, a Greek said to me, 'Who is this Mussolini, does he live in Athens?' But now the news of Albania has filtered through. The Greeks have intermarried with their neighbours, and many Greeks speak Albanian and keep it as a special language of love. For the first time, some of the things that

are happening in Europe have come home to the Greeks. From his own point of view, Mussolini has made a fatal error in seizing Albania. Meanwhile, the police regulations become stricter every day. Certain songs may not be sung, and there are enormous penalties for listening to foreign wireless stations.

Alas! politics do not belong to the picture postcard land of romance.

'Sir, can you direct me to the lavatory?'

'Stranger, the whole of Greece is before you.'

A Greek knows that he has his work cut out if he wants to cheat another Greek; so, if he is ambitious, he goes to America to make his money; and those who are left at home remain out of touch with the world. A few of the men of Poros, with wider mental horizons, have been gathering at one café where the proprietor has been discussing international affairs in animal parables. 'You can beat a donkey on the rump until you are exhausted, but he will not die until you shoot him through the heart.' Translated: There will be no war until the purse of England is attacked. Such parables are told partly by signs, gestures which are not meant for emphasis but which are words: the eyes opening for 'No', the fingers of the left hand straddling two fingers of the right for 'on horseback'. And there is the tale of a stranger who tried to get off by signs and had to repeat it all in court while he pretended that the pantomime was an enquiry as to where he could get his watch mended. But now, since the Albanian crisis, there is a new note of fatality in the parables. The proprietor says, 'What can one do? The donkey comes by and drops it.'

What can one do? But now it is not so easy to sleep on the bed of planks made from the wood to which bugs are particularly partial. And with doubt comes a packet of letters forwarded from England, and among the letters are some of the cards which were never meant for me. The sender of cards has taken the path that the Greeks once took when they tried to colonize Provence, the land where the nightingales so exasperatingly sing by day. His messages are still as urgent. He tells his friend that in Provence there are olives and *baous*, stark outcrops of white and steel-blue rock, and a plaque in the cemetery for a Greek youth who 'pleased

thrice with his dancing'. He is holding to the Grecian thread . . . it is heaven . . . there can be no valid reason for a moment's delay. . . .

Well, it was a sign. I had been led by postmarks, I would accept the guidance. I would finish my holiday in Provence, not down on the golden coast where ortolans, the 'glory of Provence', the little birds of the vine which are the privilege of the rich, are stuffed with truffles, smeared with Madeira, and placed inside turkeys' eggs to cook on burning cinders; but higher in the hills, the country film directors use for scenes of Tibet, where flying beetles, whirling in the deeper silence, have the grandeur of liqueur chocolates. I would go up above the coast towns to the goblin villages, up winding mountain roads invented by Einstein to test some theory of time. Here I would find what lay behind the tourist glitter: the fires of fig wood, the anarchist slogans scribbled on a war memorial, the clothes of national blue cloth which is 'worm cloth' because it can be destroyed only by being buried with its owner. I would find all this because the writer of the postcards said I would. He was my guide.

So I took an Italian boat from Athens to Marseilles. The passengers were mostly men, fluent in eight languages, who were risking the death penalty to smuggle currency. . . .

Stromboli aflame at night. . . .

Corsica looking like cardboard through a mist. . . .

Naples and a real Neapolitan ice. . . .

But I compromised on my goblin village because I met 'Auntie' and she told me to come to Vence. I had to go to Vence to hear Auntie's stories, to get the dope on D. H. Lawrence's death and the graft in the graveyard. The undertaker, Auntie told me, said there was no money, and Lawrence was given a pauper's grave. An American, a visitor paying homage to the master, wrote a letter to *The Times* about the scandal, and then it was decided that Lawrence should be moved from his cheap coffin. At the exhumation, Auntie was present, and she told me Lawrence's beard had grown. The body was cremated and the ashes given to Alexander Berkman. Berkman was supposed to take the remains to America. But, being a famous anarchist, Berkman found it difficult to get

his visa: Lawrence rested in a tea-caddy on the mantelpiece of a cheap hotel bedroom.

Auntie, a lady from Yorkshire who collected literary secrets, showed me the bag Lawrence carried everywhere with him: pills, buttons, needles, bits of mending cloth. It was a comment on the priest of the dark gods. Auntie also showed me a pair of scissors which a Harley Street specialist had left inside her, and from which she had suffered exquisitely for many years.

Evening in Vence brought the fireflies and the distant white faces from the sanatorium called, so encouragingly, '*Ad Astra*'.

Yes, in Vence, we were between two worlds, between the coast and the mountain villages where the life is so hard that only the old women are left and have to bury one another, and do the job badly, leaving bones sticking out from the barren soil. We had the harlequin shadows in the artificial arbour of ornamental gourds, and we had the barns stored with oranges which cannot be eaten and are grown only for their perfume.

And the invaders of Vence—the invaders who had come so long after the Greeks—they'd sit, after dinner, with drinks of artichoke and gentian, under the fairy lights of the Place: the White Russian general whose father had whipped him until his low breeches were wet with blood. ('And when the old man was left alone he got a little cat. And the little cat grew and grew. And when it wanted to go on the roof, my father would follow it with a lighted candle so it would not fall in the dark. He was kind, so kind—to the little cat.') The popular American journalist who hated 'shallow' women. ('It was the first time I met her. She said, "Do you want to make love to me?" I was so disgusted I put on my trousers and went home.') The girl from China who keeps her mystery because she never speaks. The praying mantis which sips itself drunk from a saucer on a marble-topped table. And to wait on them all, Mr Black and White, coalman by day and waiter by night; the man without a country. Once he made a bad entrance with a slight trip at the pavement's edge, and he went back to the café and did the whole thing again. 'Ah,' he says, 'my heart is red.' He is an anarchist, for when he was a commis waiter, in a big Paris restaurant, he was given, in an emergency, a table of his own. The management

decided to trust the boy who was so very keen. The young waiter took the orders and served the soup without a hitch. Then he began to serve the fish, very quickly and quietly. He was so determined there would be no delays at his table, he served three of the guests with fish before he realized that he hadn't put out the plates.

The life of Vence, then, is in the Place, where the shutters of the yellow and pink houses are never open, and the grey cats, peculiar to the district, walk among the rumours.

The first glimpse of morning brings the landworkers to the cafés for rank coffee and orange-flavoured bread fashioned in the shape of a grid in memory, and a grim one at that, of St Lawrence. These early men still sell their lives for worn farthings, driven by the same greed which occupies their fingers on a Sunday afternoon pulling the threads from pea-pods so they may be consumed for Monday's dinner.

Then the church bell, which lives securely in an iron cage, brings the wives of the bourgeoisie into the square to the priest who can be spied at night listening to the mechanical music of the buvette, reading his breviary and stamping his feet under his skirts in time with the marching tunes.

Then, after the sacred wafers, the shops open in the Place—the horse meat, the tarts filled with a glue of wild spinach, the bon-bons tied with butterfly wings for a birthday. And, following the housewives' bustle, two or three visitors to buy the papers—where is 'Monsieur de Paris', the name of any public executioner, and the next public execution.

And so one world dodges the other until, after dinner, the two are side by side in the Place, while at the central fountain a horse takes its last drink, a horse which still draws the frilled coffin carriage of the undertaker. Two worlds, each passing through the day with drugs of work or play, or the play that pretends to be work, the memoirs of the Russians and the sketchers' special H.H.H. pencils for clouds, till the evening brings them side by side and the fireflies and the small thoughts flashing in the brain. Under the fairy lights: a woman, with a painted garland round her hair, leans towards another to print a smudged flower on her forehead; the wife of the horse butcher nibbles her sixth *canard*, the cube of

sugar dipped in brandy; the white faces from the sanatorium, peering from the semi-darkness, suppress the fearful cough that goes with the torture of their beauty.

The day of the *farandole*, the day when friend joins hand with enemy to rush through the medieval streets with the fury of the belt of an incensed machine, and finally, with incalculable impetus, through the bonfire. The festival of the fire. The day of the *farandole* when people remember that the old law promised, when the mistral had blown for a week, that no man would be held responsible for his actions, not even for murder.

But now the coming war is darkening the newspapers. The intellectuals speak of the things the police are doing to 'the makers of angels', the abortionists—the old barbaric need of cannon-fodder.

And now the Chinese girl has spoken. She had been brought up in a missionary school. She, and a few others, had escaped, before the Japanese, in a small open boat. For seven days they were out at sea, and for seven days the slant-eyed girl was too prim to attend to the needs of nature. When they were rescued by an English ship she had to be rushed to an operating table. Is this, then, the glamour of the world?

But it was the end, although it took the famous Second Bureau—the French anti-spy organization which used to sound so shattering in the half-told stories whispered outside the cabinet—to prove to me that it was.

I came back from a walk to find my cottage—the cottage which Auntie had got for me during my stay—surrounded by men with drawn revolvers. There was a crowd of spectators—the peasant friends of yesterday, the enemies of today. It was so unreal, I felt guilty—of anything. They ordered me to open up the house, and I produced the latch key—about eight inches long and a good six pounds in weight—and unlocked the fortress door which goes with the barred windows of a Provençal cottage.

The armed men poured in and cried out with excitement whenever they found a notebook or a sheet of manuscript. Then I was marched off, through a line of scowling villagers, to the headquarters of the famous Bureau. (Vence was going to be general H.Q. in the event of 'trouble' on the Italian front.)

I didn't find the tricks any less disconcerting because I knew them to be tricks. I was left in an empty room for hours, then marched to a chamber where three men presided at a long table and paid no attention to me. Finally, my inquisition. . . .

The case against me began with my typewriter. (Yes, I'd been foolish enough to take my typewriter on my holiday, thinking there would be so much, as indeed there was, that I'd want to record.) The natives had heard me typing. How did they know that I was not sending messages to Moscow? Then I had received letters under two names. (Yes, those cards which were never meant for me.) Then I had taken long walks in the hills, and might I not be mapping out the country? (Please, large-scale maps can still be bought at the stationer's.) But people had seen my light burning very late at night? So I told them that writers often do like to work when the mood is on them, and that I'd been making notes, the very notes from which this memoir is now written. Very well, then, they said, they would read my notes for code.

I was sure that I would never again have such attentive readers, but I cannot say I enjoyed the story. I felt the plot had passed out of my own hands, and that I could no longer be certain of the happy ending; for little did I think, when I bought my ticket for romance at Victoria Station, that I was also qualifying myself to become a Russian spy. Oh, they were certain I was working for Russia, because at Vence I took my morning coffee at a bistro whose proprietor had left-wing views.

So I was detained while the Second Bureau studied my manuscript. Then everything was on the let-down plane. They found no code, and they handed me over to the civil police, and I was dragged to a local cell for more interrogations, and more waiting. Ultimately a gendarme admitted, in a regretful voice, that even the civil police could not find evidence to convict me. 'But,' he said, 'the people in the town are roused—you know they have been throwing stones at the window of your cell?—you must leave at once.'

Negro soldiers pouring up the hill road from Vence to Nice; and in the dark it is a strange journey, passing the invisible advancing troops. Outside the station at Nice there is a Hitchcock

refugee scene; the station entrance is barred and people are sitting around on bundles. At about five o'clock in the morning I go to the exit, which is unprotected, and walk on to the platform. One step nearer. But the rumour among the people waiting on the platform is there will be no more trains. . . .

Two days to get to Paris, for, every so often, the rolling stock is commandeered. Conscripts, sometimes, spread out garlic sausages and hard-boiled eggs and long thin loaves and give a purely formal invitation to share their last meal from home. When I break all the rules and accept them, with great embarrassment, hand me a morsel of bread. Two days of hard-eyed women and weeping men. But thank God there is none of the revolting 'we're in for a jolly good scrap' business: these people know what war means. Two days to get to Paris. All the cafés are shut.

Calais, at last! And now they come round and ask us if we'd like to get off the boat. War has been declared and everyone is expecting a Wellsian blitz.

Never has a boat whisked across the Channel at this speed.

Dover.

London. . . . London and war. . . .

Outside Victoria Station a mother is having difficulty with her offspring. She says, 'Come along, darling, we've got no time for shopping.'

And the child protests, 'Not even to buy me something?'

And mother says, patiently, 'What could we buy for you, precious?'

'Mummy, don't be so selfish. You know there are plenty of things you could buy for me.'

But I . . . I'd had my money's worth. Whatever was to come—and I knew it was to be murder to the *n*th degree—I'd seen Poros. I hadn't missed everything.

When I got home, I found the last of the cards. The writer, with an appalling optimism for one who had conducted a one-sided correspondence for months, wrote: 'Do you know the conventional end of any Greek love story: "And they loved well, and we still better."' It was a very shiny card.

The World of Green

A HOLIDAY IN A GARDEN

by ALEC BRISTOW

It really was going to be the perfect holiday this time. The trouble with gardening holidays, as I had found when I tried them before, is that a holiday *in* the garden is usually the exact opposite of a holiday *from* the garden. But then I had made the mistake of trying the experiment in my own garden, which is the one place in the world where there is no peace. You might as well expect a housewife to find rest in her own kitchen.

This time I had the answer. I was going to take my holiday in someone else's garden. There the slugs and the weeds would not be my responsibility; I would be able to enjoy the place as a pleasant whole, instead of seeing it as an unpleasant series of jobs crying out to be done. Relaxing in my corner seat, soothed by the beat of the train-wheels, I thought with satisfaction of the nice long rest ahead.

To me, a holiday must be a rest. I will have no part of this change-is-as-good-as-a-rest nonsense. A change is *not* as good as a rest, and never will be. I doubt if anyone really believes that it is; if they did, there would be no need for a proverb to persuade them. (Like most proverbs, it is an attempt to make us believe something obviously untrue; we all know perfectly well that fiction is much stranger than truth, and that it often rains without pouring.)

Offered the choice between a change and a rest, ordinary lazy people would, if they followed their natural instincts, settle for the